

Winter 2-1-2021

## The World of Jak Smyrl: South Carolina Artist, Journalist, Cartoonist

Kathelene McCarty Smith

*The University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Smith, Kathelene McCarty (2021) "The World of Jak Smyrl: South Carolina Artist, Journalist, Cartoonist," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 68 : Iss. 4 , Article 12.

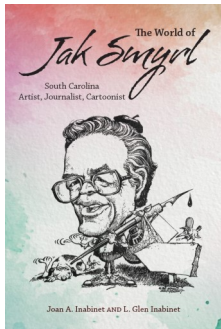
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol68/iss4/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Southeastern Librarian by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

Mother Jones also makes this book of interest to scholars of women's history. Recommended for both academic and public libraries.

Tim Dodge, Auburn University

***The World of Jak Smyrl: South Carolina Artist, Journalist, Cartoonist***



Joan A. Inabinet and  
L. Glen Inabinet  
Columbia: The University of  
South Carolina Press, 2020  
ISBN: 9781643360492  
368 p. \$34.99 (Hbk)

In the recent biography *The world of Jak Smyrl: South Carolina Artist, Journalist, Cartoonist*, the narrative begins at the end of Smyrl's life as he is honored by the South Carolina General Assembly for his distinguished career as an artist and writer. This narrative structure enables authors Joan and Glen Inabinet to reflect on Smyrl's life and accomplishments, giving perspective to the events which shaped him into an artist with enduring relevance.

The book is divided into four main parts: Smyrl's childhood in Camden, South Carolina; his years as a Marine during World War II; his college days; and his professional career. The first several chapters describe Smyrl's family life in 1920s South Carolina. Oscar Jackson Smyrl, Jr., nicknamed "Jack," was born into a close-knit family in the small southern town of Camden, with a history dating back to colonial times. The authors are highly effective in depicting what it was like to grow up in a town that was a "social mecca" for tourists in the winter, and a vibrant local community during the rest of the year. Smyrl's childhood included silent movies at the Majestic Theatre, visiting families and friends, ice cream at the roller rink, and spiritual revivals. He was part of a never-ending community of siblings, aunts, uncles, and assorted cousins with which to engage in outdoor adventures and "sociable storytelling." Describing himself as "never lonely and never bored," the young Jack developed an active imagination, and by the first grade, he began to experiment with drawing. Early sketches reflected a child's idyllic point of view, yet in reality, it was the time of the Depression and the poor southern

economy resulted in changes in the community and his life.

After his high school graduation, Smyrl enrolled at Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University), but he soon left school to volunteer for the U.S. Marines during the years of World War II. He saw combat in the Pacific and was in North China during the occupation. When the circumstances became overwhelming, he would draw pictures for his comrades to keep their spirits up. The war greatly influenced his life, and several chapters describe his time in the Marines with images of illustrated letters, humorous sketches, and photographs.

After returning from the war, Smyrl studied at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and the University of South Carolina. While at the University, he took art classes and found success in creating illustrations for campus publications. During his senior year, Smyrl made the decision to leave school and apply for his "dream job" as a commercial artist at Columbia's *The State* newspaper. It was then that he dropped the "c" in his first name, famously saying, "I was just a poor artist. I couldn't afford a 'c.'" Smyrl may be especially remembered for his annual pieces about the South Carolina-Clemson rivalry. In fact, he is credited with creating the first fighting Gamecock logo. Smyrl spent over thirty-seven years as *The State's* first artist, but was also a well-known free-lance illustrator, creating comic sketches and artwork for books and other assignments.

Enhanced by photographs and illustrations, *The World of Jak Smyrl* is a well-researched book about a remarkable man. The authors have mined Smyrl's personal papers housed in the Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, as well as numerous personal interviews, to create a compelling account of his life and career. Even readers who are unfamiliar with Smyrl and his vast body of work will appreciate the authors' efforts at creating a "time capsule" that captures small-town life in the rural south, harrowing war-time experiences, and a distinguished career that will be appreciated well into the future.

Kathelene McCarty Smith, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro